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Follow-up to and preparation for the Economic and Social Council

Note by the Administrator

I. PURPOSE

1. The present note is intended to apprise the Executive Board about measures taken by UNDP to follow up on the main conclusions of the 1995 substantive session of the Economic and Social Council. The main conclusions of the session are contained in resolution E/1995/51; other pertinent resolutions are E/1995/56 and E/1995/50.

2. In particular, the report presents information to the Executive Board on issues pertaining to follow-up to international conferences, scheduling of future meetings of the Board, monitoring and evaluation activities, budgetary issues and humanitarian issues. More detailed reports on these issues will be submitted to the Board at subsequent sessions in response to specific requests.

II. PRIORITIES FOR UNDP ASSISTANCE

3. In its resolution E/1995/51, the Economic and Social Council requests United Nations funds and programmes to give high priority in their budgets to least developed countries (LDCs), low-income countries and countries in transition. In its landmark decision 95/23, the Executive Board approved successor programming arrangements that are aimed at achieving an even higher degree of progressivity than in the previous cycles in the assignment of resources to LDCs and low-income countries. Thus, for instance, the new arrangements require that 60 per cent of core resources be allocated to LDCs as compared to 55 per cent in the fifth programming cycle (1992-1996). In fact, more than 58 per cent of fifth cycle resources have been allocated to LDCs. The

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share for low-income countries will increase to 88 per cent of core resources as compared to 87 per cent in the fifth cycle. It is also expected that the allocation to Africa in general will be higher than that in the last programming period.

4. Under the new successor arrangements, the Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States region will receive, on an annual basis, more than double the resources it received on the fifth programming cycle. The Executive Board also decided to allocate an additional 0.5 per cent of core resources to this region, given the special needs and requirements of countries with economies in transition.

A. Follow-up to international conferences

5. In its resolution E/1995/51, the Economic and Social Council also requests the Executive Boards of funds and programmes to take fully into account the relevant resolutions and recommendations of United Nations conferences in the economic, social and related fields in establishing their priorities.

International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD)

6. UNDP has direct involvement in a number of key ICPD themes, such as HIV/AIDS, where it collaborates closely with the Joint and Co-sponsored United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS). UNDP has not only helped to strengthen government capacity to respond to the epidemic, but also that of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs), by enhancing their capacity to monitor, document, evaluate and enhance programme design and implementation. Partnership programmes are being supported in, for example, Bangladesh, Djibouti, India, Mexico, Nigeria and Senegal. UNDP has supported research networks, particularly in the Africa region and has participated in interregional and regional as well as country-level conferences, workshops, consultations, and planning and evaluation exercises often in collaboration with partner agencies, including the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

7. UNDP has also collaborated with other United Nations agencies on a number of HIV/AIDS inter-agency activities, such as the Paris AIDS Summit, the Inter-Agency AIDS Advisory Group (IAAG) and others. In the broader context of inter-agency collaboration in the follow-up to the World Conference on Education for all, of which UNDP was a core sponsor, UNDP has collaborated actively with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and UNFPA on the Education for All (E-9), including the mini-summit held in conjunction with the World Summit on Social Development (WSSD) and, most recently, in the E-9 held in September 1995.

World Summit on Social Development

8. UNDP has launched a number of initiatives since WSSD not only to maintain the momentum of this unprecedented event at the forefront of the national development agenda in its programme countries but also to fulfil the mandate

given in June 1995 to UNDP by its Executive Board - namely to make poverty elimination UNDP's "overriding" concern.

9. The Bureau for Policy and Programme Support (BPPS) has sought to guide the UNDP implementation of the WSSD agenda through the preparation of a poverty eradication policy framework for country strategies, which analyses strategic entry points for multisectoral action. BPPS, the Regional Bureau for Africa and the Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific have held meetings with the World Bank and UNICEF to review collective experience in the areas of poverty indicators and poverty assessments and monitoring, so as to identify possibilities for collaborative action to be undertaken at the country level. The Administrator has also taken a decision following WSSD to redeploy $10 million from Special Programme Resources (SPR) for national poverty eradication efforts, especially to encourage and support the formulation and implementation of national policies and strategies that will contribute substantially to reducing overall poverty in the shortest possible time, diminishing inequalities and eradicating absolute poverty by a target date to be specified by each country in its national context.

Fourth World Conference on Women

10. Since the Conference, UNDP has been preparing for a strategic contribution to the implementation of the Platform for Action. The Platform indicated that resident coordinators will play a key role in the implementation of the Platform agreements; UNDP will ensure that they are given the support that they need to carry out this responsibility. UNDP will be working hard to ensure that gender concerns are mainstreamed throughout its policy, programme and administration procedures and practices, and that Governments are fully supported as they seek to incorporate the Platform requirements into their own national planning processes.

11. UNDP is collaborating with the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development in the development and application of methodologies and tools for the incorporation of gender information into national development planning processes. These are being tested in Bangladesh, Jamaica, Morocco, Viet Nam and Uganda. UNDP is also collaborating with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the International Labour Organization and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization and other agencies in the development of socio-economic and gender-analysis training materials. The aim is increased capacity of national-level development professionals to implement the Platform for Action and to develop national plans and programmes that incorporate engendered socio-economic analysis. The intention is to build upon and utilize local capacity to carry out gender analysis, policy research, training and programme implementation.

B. Scheduling of Executive Board meetings

12. As requested in paragraph 5 of Economic and Social Council resolution E/1995/50, the secretariat of the UNDP/UNFPA Executive Board proposed at the third regular session of the Board that the dates for the annual session be moved forward to 6-17 May 1996 if the session is held in Geneva and 13-24 May if

held in New York. The Executive Board endorsed this proposal in its decision 95/37 of 15 September 1995.

13. The request for funds and programmes to report jointly to the Economic and Social Council through the Secretary-General on questions relating to coordination, cooperation, the division of labour, and on other issues they consider important (E/1995/51, para. 8) has been added to the agenda of the Joint Consultative Group on Policy (JCGP) general meeting schedules for December 1995. Immediately following the 1995 substantive session of the Economic and Social Council, UNDP took the initiative of apprising the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the current Chair of JCGP, of the request for joint reporting. UNDP will take a very supportive position on the item at the JCGP meeting in December 1995 and will seek through the formal and informal channels within JCGP to reach early consensus on the matter.

C. Monitoring and evaluation

14. In its resolution E/1995/51, the Economic and Social Council requests United Nations funds and programmes to attach high priority to their procedures for monitoring and evaluation activities. In this context, UNDP has taken a number of significant initiatives, including the merging of evaluation and strategic planning functions in the Office of Evaluation and Strategic Planning (OESP), which is now reporting directly to the Administrator; the launching of strategic and timely evaluations on such aspects as national execution, cost-sharing, the resident coordinator system, evaluations of SPR-funded programmes on key areas that led to concrete actions for improvement: poverty alleviation, aid coordination, the Human Development Report, technical cooperation among developing countries (TCDC), HIV/AIDS, the Management Development Programme, environment and refugees in Latin America; the development of a programme impact performance assessment in several centres of experimentation; an improved system for monitoring the compliance of evaluation requirements at the project level; and an initiative to decentralize the evaluation database at the country level.

15. With respect to improving national participation in the process of evaluation of the efficiency and effectiveness of assistance provided by the United Nations funds and programmes, the following activities have been reinforced: two regional training courses on monitoring and evaluation for government officials and national staff from UNDP country offices have been conducted in Addis Ababa and Buenos Aires; country analysis of monitoring and evaluation capacity at the request of programme countries, e.g., Jordan, Morocco and Paraguay; a critical review of UNDP efforts in producing these country analysis reports has been carried out that will lead to a refinement of the terms of reference for the exercise, and a better dissemination of the findings; and a development of a portfolio of country programme evaluations with more involvement of national expertise in these exercises.

16. UNDP has also undertaken measures to promote greater collaboration among United Nations funds and programmes in the evaluation of their activities. In particular, UNDP has been very active through the different coordination mechanisms such as the JCGP Sub-group on Harmonization led by UNFPA, the

Inter-Agency Working Group on Evaluation led by UNDP and the Administrative Committee on Coordination panel of experts on rural development led by IFAD.

D. Budgetary issues

17. The budgetary reductions introduced by UNDP for 1996-1997 will be the third consecutive reduction in a strategy initiated four years ago in the context of the 1992-1993 budget. UNDP expects to reduce administrative costs by $106 million by the end of 1997 compared to 1992 and reduce the total number of core staff positions by more than 600.

18. In paragraph 10 if its decision 95/28, the Executive Board appreciated the proposal of the Administrator to continue a restrictive budget policy and to implement volume reductions with the aim of maximizing the resources that are available for programme and programme support activities.

19. With the view to promoting greater budget transparency, the current presentation of the UNDP budget was developed over time in consultation with the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions and the Governing Council, starting with the revised budget estimates for 1990-1991 and budget estimates for 1992-1993. UNDP has been and continues to be fully committed to contributing towards the harmonization of budget presentations.

20. In paragraph 2 of its decision 95/30, the Executive Board also took note of the continuous commitment of UNDP to contribute to the harmonization of budget presentations. In this connection, UNDP is working closely with UNFPA and UNICEF in the preparation for the various reports and proposals on this subject, as requested in decision 95/30.

E. Humanitarian issues

21. In order to provide the Economic and Social Council with requested inputs in line with resolution E/1995/56, UNDP is examining its coordination and operational responsibilities, together with its operatives and financial capacity to respond to countries in special situations. In particular, the following four activities are under way:

(a) Review of UNDP pre-crisis, crisis and post-crisis services and programmes in order to establish an effective corporate approach to deal with countries in special situations;

(b) Formulation of successor programming arrangements for countries in special situations;

(c) Assessment of UNDP capacity to fulfil its mandate to respond effectively to countries in special circumstances;

(d) Participation in an inter-agency task force established by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee on Humanitarian Operations to develop a common approach to deal with the follow-up to resolution E/1995/56.

22. The Administrator will include in his reports to the Executive Board at its second regular session and at its annual session substantial information on progress in the above activities.

III. EXECUTIVE BOARD ACTION

23. The Executive Board may wish to

Take note of the present note.